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Beyond Service Learning: Building Research Capacity Among Undergraduate Students and Community Residents

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Beyond Service Learning: Building Research Capacity Among Undergraduate Students and Community Residents

Mayara Fontes, Daniela Bravo, Josibel García, Aida Palencia, Joseli Alonzo, Lina Rosario, Norma Fuentes, Tomás Hernández, Phillip Granberry, María Idalí Torres, and PRCC Research Team

Summary

Historically, undergraduate students and community residents have been underutilized in research. Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) allows for a bidirectional learning process that facilitates the training of both groups so that they can be future researchers who sustain research activities in the community.

In this research, we present how a CBPR project has helped a group of undergraduate students from University of Massachusetts Boston and community residents from Springfield to transform their perceptions about community, research, and working together as a research team.

Key to the successful experience of university students and community residents was the opportunity to (1) interact with faculty members while conducting field research; (2) participate in trainings and reflection exercises that demystify the research process; and (3) develop a research team that broke down barriers of traditional power structures.

Approaches



**The Shock-
Learning by Doing**



**Making Sense of Theory
- Applying Research
Concepts**



**I Can Do Research -
Personal and
Professional Growth**

UMass Boston Student Perspectives

The Shock – Learning by Doing

- “I got to see what goes on behind the scenes of a project, *details, details, details...* that take place to figure out the best course of action.”
- “I liked the type of research as well. It was not just to publish a paper but to actually try to help a community.”

Professional Growth- Inspired for Even Achieving Higher Education and Considering Graduate School

- “After this research I learned that I hope to go to graduate school and hopefully earn my doctorate in psychology while doing an active participatory research project.”
- “Now, I want to get my PhD to do research and help my community.”

Self-Developed Growth

- “I’m starting to see how my own experiences shape the kind of research I would like to do in the future.”
- “The project allowed me to grow... While I was trying to obtain data and conduct research, I was also learning about myself. As a young female daughter, the topic of sexual health also relates to my own wellbeing; there were some questions that I had never considered or even discussed with my own mother.”

Working with the Community

- “Research with the community can become your home. You started to care and create friendships with people you are working with, and helping... We were able to gain insiders’ perspectives into the research, which made the project more personal and meaningful.”
- “This environment has proven to show that people want to help better their community... Research isn’t just about the paperwork; it’s also about the people behind those endless interviews who matter because they are putting in time and effort to make something happen.”

References and Resources

Granberry, Phillip and et al (2013). *Preparing Latino Community Residents and Undergraduate Students to Conduct Health Equity Research: Action and Reflection on a Neighborhood Mapping Project*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Torres, I. (2013) *Deepening Partnerships to Advance Scientific Knowledge and Social Change through Community-Based Participatory Action Research* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from: <http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute/publications>

Community Researcher Perspectives

The Shock – Discovering “New” Things

- “I’ve learned of places that I didn’t know were here, and I have lived here all of my life.”

Research as a Tool to Solve Community Problems: Developing and Applying Basic Research

- “This is what we are saying. It is a Pandora’s box, sometimes you begin to talk to them and sometimes they end up knowing more than you do... So I will have these questions written in a paper for next week.”
- “I guess we will have to incorporate some type of series of questions about sex education itself so we can see where parents in sex education stand because a lot of them, I think, they know about sex but I want to make sure.”

The Impact Research Has on the Community Members

They see themselves as a tool to reach out to the community, but they also see themselves as a valuable asset for positive community change.

After being part of the project: Goals and Aspirations

Losing weight, being healthier, going back to school, working on different projects to strengthen the community.



Partnership Information

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